

Diocesan Guidelines for the MINISTRY OF ALTAR SERVER

Diocese of Orlando
Office of Liturgy

I. STATEMENT FROM *GENERAL INSTRUCTION OF THE ROMAN MISSAL*

In addition to the service of instituted acolytes, service at the altar by other ministers represents a long liturgical tradition. These servers enhance the quality of the celebration for the whole assembly by giving the priest freedom of movement, ensuring that all the requisites for the celebration are available at the appropriate moments and by taking part in the processions (*GIRM* 68).

- * Servers hold the book while the presiding priest proclaims the presidential prayers with outstretched hands. They bring and hold such things as books, censers, water jug and towel, plates and dishes, and microphones. They lead the entrance and concluding processions with cross and candles and they escort the deacon (or priest) to the ambo and flank him while he proclaims the gospel reading. They may, on more solemn occasions, accompany the procession with the gifts. They tend the censer, prepare it for the priest or deacon, and themselves incense the assembly and other ministers.

- * The number of servers will depend on the circumstances and the tasks to be performed.

II. REQUIREMENTS

Young persons, boys or girls, who exercise the ministry of server should be mature enough to understand their responsibilities, to carry them out well, and to adhere to a spirit of reverence. They should already have received holy communion for the first time.

Adults, men or women, who exercise the ministry of server should be fully initiated, active members of the community and of sufficient competency and temperament to undertake this ministry with grace, respect, and discretion.

No distinction should be made between the functions carried out in the sanctuary by men and boys and those carried out by women and girls. Every effort should be made to include both males and females in this ministry and not to exclude either gender.

III. VESTURE

Vestments serve several functions in the celebration of the Eucharist. As festal clothing, for example, they suggest the ritual and solemn character of the Eucharistic banquet, and as insignia, they identify the specific function or ministry of those who wear them (*GIRM* 297).

The garment common to all ministers is the alb since it is a reminder of the baptismal garment. All servers should wear the same vesture for it expresses unity and enhances the

visual dignity of the celebration.

Since albs no longer have the character of an undergarment, their form and design should complement the ritual and festive character of the celebration. An alb is most appropriate for the ministry of the altar server. The alb may be either white or off-white. It may have a hood and could be bound at the waist by a cincture. The cincture may be of the proper liturgical color of the season (*GIRM* 289).

It seems inappropriate to use a cassock and surplice since the cassock is a clerical garment.

IV. SEATING

The proper place for the seating of altar servers is in the assembly, perhaps in the front row of seating, or, in older churches, some special area of the sanctuary. From this place they should assist the presider as needed. They should not be seated on either side of the presider; this place is reserved for the deacon.

V. TRAINING

Servers should be instructed in the basics of the liturgy and formed in this ministry before they begin to function. They should be made aware of the distinctions between the liturgical books, encouraged to dress appropriately, and be present in sufficient time preceding the liturgy to receive proper instruction regarding any particular ritual or circumstance which may effect them in their ministry.

In addition to the informational aspect of training, the formational element should not be neglected. Memorized skills are not always helpful in the execution of the liturgy. Rather, if formation occurs, the concept of liturgy will be conveyed. Servers need to be seen and trained as true liturgical and communal ministries. Appropriate days of training and reflection are necessary. There should always be the opportunity to grow *within* the ministry instead of *away* from it.

It would be advantageous to train some of the older servers (high school or college) to serve as liturgical masters of ceremonies to assist the presider and deacon in the more solemn liturgies of the year.

VI. OPERATING PROCEDURE

A. Introductory Rites

Servers may carry the cross and candles to be used for the liturgy. Upon reaching the sanctuary, they should immediately bow (not waiting for the presider to bow) and proceed to their seats. If servers are carrying cross or candles, after simply bowing their heads, place these in the proper places before proceeding to their seats. One server, usually the cross bearer, is assigned the task of holding the book. This person should be attentive to the needs of the presider at the chair and be prepared to move to the presider for the Opening Prayer and any other texts which would be required prior to it.

B. Liturgy of the Word

Primarily, the servers are to be attentive and responsive members of the congregation throughout the Liturgy of the Word.

At the Gospel procession, servers may accompany the deacon (or priest) with or without candles and incense.

The book bearer should come forward for the Creed and the General Intercessions.

C. Liturgy of the Eucharist

In the absence of a deacon, one server should prepare the altar with the *Sacramentary*, the chalice, and a purificator.

One or more servers may assist in the reception of the gifts, in bringing a cruet of water to the altar, and in washing the hands of the presider.

Servers should remain standing throughout the Eucharistic Prayer. When the presider genuflects following the consecration, the servers should bow.

The practice of ringing bells at the moments of epiclesis and consecration have been abolished. The practice of holding communion plates (patens) during the distribution of communion has also been abolished.

Altar servers normally receive the eucharist whenever they participate in the liturgy and receive communion in the same manner and form as the other ministers and the assembly. At some point during the distribution of communion, a server should remove the *Sacramentary*, the chalice, and the purificator from the altar to the credence table. The servers then return to their seats.

D. Concluding Rites

The book bearer should bring the book to the presider for the Prayer after Communion and the Blessing (if a solemn blessing is to be used).

When the music begins, the cross should be retrieved and the other servers then move to the front of the sanctuary. When the presider bows, all ministers bow and then turn and lead the procession out of church.

VII. INSTALLATION OF ALTAR SERVERS

The *Book of Blessings*, Chapter 62, provides an excellent model for the blessing of liturgical ministers. Altar servers, like others who serve in various liturgical ministries, should be commissioned by the parish; servers should be seen as liturgical ministers and not as a separate entity.

REFERENCE ABBREVIATIONS

GIRM

General Instruction of the Roman Missal